

Optimizing Health

District Helps Residents Take Charge of a Healthy Lifestyle

LINCOLN, Kan. – Sandra Newell says her daily walks around town make her feel like a million bucks. Actually, even better.

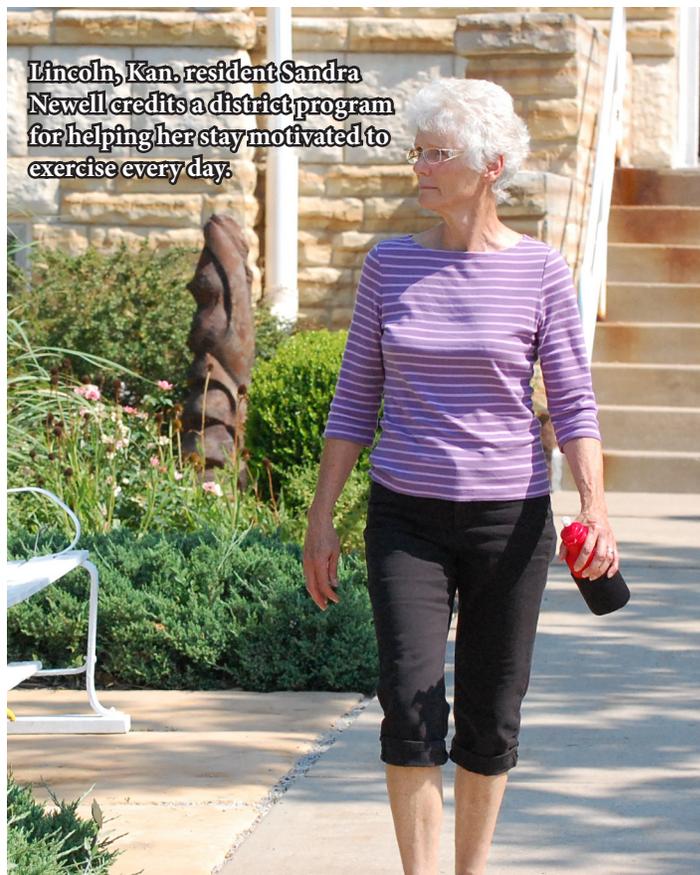
“To me, health is worth more than money,” said the 71-year-old Kansan. “I mean, if you have bad health, it does not matter how much money you have, because there are a lot of things you can’t do because of bad health.”

In this town of just over 1,300 people, Newell is a good example – and something of an advocate – for good health. She walks every day, does strength exercises at the community center, and makes sure she eats her fruits and vegetables every day.

“My mother lived to be 101,” Newell said. “She was still exercising and biking in her 90’s. I think I will probably live to be quite elderly and I want to be able to enjoy my life as well as she did.”

The Post Rock Extension District recently helped Newell with another means for doing just that. District agents Kathy Lupfer-Nielsen and Nadine Sigle – who work in the Lincoln and Osborne offices, respectively – have teamed up to offer the Kansas Optimizing Health Program (KOHP) in the district’s communities.

“KOHP is a program that helps people manage chronic disease,” Sigle said. “I find it kind of interesting that the acronym is KOHP (pronounced “cope”) because



Lincoln, Kan. resident Sandra Newell credits a district program for helping her stay motivated to exercise every day.

it...helps people manage their chronic disease.”

At one time, Newell was diagnosed with osteopenia, a condition where bone mineral density is lower than normal, a precursor to osteoporosis. Armed with the knowledge and support from KOHP classes, Newell began doing light, weight-resistance exercises.

The result: “My bone density has built back up,” she says.

“I had always been kind of a walker, but walking alone did not do it. When I started walking and doing the resistance machines, I was able to rebuild my bones. And, I have been off medicine now for over a year.”

Giving people the knowledge of how to help themselves and a peer group that can support them is a key component to KOHP, said Lupfer-Nielsen.

“We hope to empower people,” she said. “We are

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not doctors or health care professionals, but we can help people, encourage people...[J]ust get people to focus on the specific goals that they can accomplish.”

As of 2012, the program had been offered in four communities in the Post Rock District – Beloit, Downs, Lincoln and Smith Center. Lupfer-Nielsen and Sigle say they have had early success with participants who were suffering from fibromyalgia, arthritis and diabetes.

Determining what works for each person “really depends on where the individual is at,” Sigle said. Most participants center their efforts on exercise and nutrition, but others just need a little break.

“In order to have some mental relief, they might need to practice relaxation techniques,” Sigle said. “Or to relieve stress, it might mean that they have to do some organization in their house and reduce some clutter. There are many different types of things that people may put in their action plan.”

The program is time-intensive, for both agents and participants. Being in an extension district is a key for Lupfer-Nielsen and Sigle having the time to plan the



Agent Nadine Sigle has helped implement the Kansans Optimizing Health Program in four counties of the Post Rock District.



Kathy Lupfer-Nielsen

program. But participants also must commit to six, two-hour classes held over 12 weeks.

Newell, for one, says it’s well worth the time.

“It definitely makes a difference for me,” she said.

“It has made me less fearful of what is ahead of me because I know there is help available. All you have to do is use and take advantage of the things you learn.”